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THE INTELLIGIBILITY OF ROMAN IMPERIAL COIN TYPES

By C. H. V. SUTHERLAND

If any ancient historian—either Greek or Roman—made any systematic comment on the principles observed in the choice of coin types in the classical world his account has not come down to us. Aristotle, indeed, in his *Politics*,¹ made a theoretical reference to coin types when he wrote ὁ γὰρ χαρακτήρ ἐτέθη τοῦ ποσοῦ σημεῖον. This reference, though it is of characteristic Aristotelian brevity, in reality goes beyond the theory and implies the almost invariable principles of choice everywhere. For, as scholars have often noted and now generally agree,² when Aristotle defined the addition of a type to a coin as a means of indicating its value, he was saying not that the type showed how great the value of the coin is, but that its very presence gives an assurance that the proper value of the coin—whatever that value might be—can be safely assumed. As G. F. Hill pointed out,³ and as will be seen later, ‘the importance of this apparently subtle distinction lies in its bearing on the significance of types.’

Apart from this terse axiom from Aristotle, we lack any well informed comment from antiquity concerning the theoretical nature of coin types. In modern studies, however, the analysis and interpretation of Greek and Roman coin types has attracted constant attention, from the time when, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the first and often sadly misguided efforts were made to understand their allusions down to the present day when, though their pattern is mainly clear, the principles of application are still keenly disputed and are sometimes said to be misguided still. The ultimate stimulus to enquiry has always come from one abundant cause. Although even a complete assemblage of ancient coin types could not ever rank as a source of full or connected comment, like the surviving works of ancient authors, and lacks even the spasmodic definitiveness of a body of ancient inscriptions, nevertheless Greek and Roman coins offer an obviously vast bulk of pictorial allusion and brief verbal comment. From that bulk, it has always been felt, a corresponding measure of documentary information can be extracted if the right methods of analysis and interpretation are used.

Viewed broadly, the types of Greek and of Roman coins differ widely from each other. Until Greece fell under the Macedonian monarch Greek coinage proper—excluding, that is to say, the coins of special areas like the eastern kingdoms such as Lydia and Persia—consisted of a great variety of individual city-coinages issued either by democratic governments or by oligarchies or by τύραννοι who claimed to rule, by popular assent, in the name of the people: the existence of tyrants at such cities as Athens or Syracuse or Cyrene in no way affected the appearance of coinage as being issued in the name of those cities, and was not normally reflected by types which were personal to the tyrants themselves.⁴ Within this great range of city-coinages there is found, as is natural, an equally great range of distinguishing coin-types, though the types of individual cities showed reluctance to make major internal changes. At Rome coinage was developed in a different political climate. For, as soon as Rome built up first her supremacy in Italy and then her provincial dominions, Roman Republican coinage gradually turned into a world coinage. Though in fact it came to enjoy an immense internal variety of types, this was a variety of choice and not of necessity—as was the case in the autonomous days of Greece, when city competed with city. This principle of internal variety was in due course transmitted to the imperial coinage and there employed for substantially different reasons.

The general pattern of Greek coin types has been under keen scrutiny for 120 years, ever since Thomas Burgon published his ‘Inquiry into the Motive which influenced the Ancients in their Choice of the various Representations which we find stamped on their Money’.⁵ Burgon rejected, as motives for the choice of Greek coin types, the allusions to soil fertility, fauna and flora, characteristic manufactures and products, and famous events of the past, which earlier scholars like Pellerin, Sestini, Fröhlich, and Eckhel had

¹ i, 1257a, ad fin.

² Cf. G. F. Hill, *Handbook of Greek and Roman Coins* 67, n. 2, as against (e.g.) J. G. Milne, *Greek Coinage* 1.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Cf. F. Lenormant, *La monnaie dans l'antiquité* 11, 3 ff.

⁵ *Numismatic Journal* 1837, 97 ff.

very reasonably postulated. Instead he argued at length that 'from the first striking of money, down to the extinction of the Byzantine Empire, religion was the sole motive of the types of coins', although he was aware, uncomfortably, that canting types (or *types parlants*) such as the rose at Rhodes, the σέλινον at Selinus, and the seal at Phocaea, were probably difficult to explain on his theory. The theory of Burgon nevertheless took hold, and was amplified and strengthened a generation later. E. Curtius then put forward the more extreme view ⁶ that ancient coinage was first struck in the temples of the gods where the priests, after inventing it, became large capitalists, and that their power began to wane only at a time when, with corporate coin-legends beginning to accompany the previous unscripted priestly badge, rights of coinage were presumably being transferred from priestly to other and more secular authorities.

Reaction against this general approach came inevitably. Already in 1887 the first edition of Head's *Historia Numorum* was stating ⁷ that it 'was necessary that the coin-type should consist of a generally intelligible device, which might appeal to the eyes of all as the sacred emblem of the god whose dreaded name was thus invoked to vouch for the good faith of the issuer'. The religious theory was thus greatly diluted. In 1892 Ridgeway's brilliant *Origin of Metallic Currency and Weight Standards* set out to weaken it still further. He argued that Greek coin types, so far from being the mark of religious control, consist often of representations of objects (e.g. cattle, axes, and shields) that had served as exchange units in a pre-coinage age. Ridgeway, it should be noted, did not pretend that the choice of types was governed by this principle alone: he was ready to allow ⁸ the partial operation of mythological and religious factors side by side with the operation of commercial factors.

After Head and Ridgeway came Macdonald's classic *Coin Types: their Origin and Development* (1905)—a work of immense learning and good judgment on which nearly all subsequent theory has been based. It was itself founded upon two very important axioms,⁹ that 'no explanation of the origin and nature of coin types can be regarded as satisfactory which is not applicable to all coins of a homogeneous group, or which fails to account for archaic types'—archaic types being, of course, the simplest, the most direct, and the most elemental. Macdonald's main thesis ¹⁰ was that the types of Greek coins are, broadly speaking, the badges distinguishing the cities that issued those coins. He adduced ample comparative evidence ¹¹ for this view from the official town-badges stamped on pottery, branded on public slaves, painted on arms and armour, engraved on inscriptions, and in some cases even specified by ancient writers. It was, of course, a short step from the use of a city badge to types which, like the dolphin in the sickle-shaped harbour at Zancle, could give a topographical shorthand description of the issuing town.¹² Macdonald's view did not for a moment exclude the operation of religious consciousness in the choice of a city badge and thus of a coin type, for, as Hill had already stated,¹³ 'owing to the extraordinary penetration of religion into all the affairs of life among the Greeks and Romans it is by no means entirely unscholarly to read a religious sense into what often at first sight appears to be something very different.'

In general, then, the types of ancient coinage are now regarded primarily as distinguishing marks, pointing intelligibly to the authorities which were known to use those badges and implying that the value of the coins themselves was of the standard normally maintained by those authorities. Study of the inscriptions on Greek coins ¹⁴ confirmed this view in a way which neither the religious nor even the commercial view of coin types made possible. Greek coins were normally struck in the name of a people, or of a people corporately conceived of by a town name, or of a ruler, e.g. Συρακοσίων, Ἀκράγαντος, Ἀλεξάνδρου; the inscriptions Ταραντίνων ἡμῖ, Φαιστίων (or Γορτυνίων) τὸ παῖμα, Σεύθα κόμμα, Κόττυος χαρακτήρ, or even Ἀθη(ναίων) ὁ δῆμος make this perfectly clear. The principle of the corporate ownership of a coinage (a principle which had to be defended

⁶ *Monatsbericht d. Kön. preuss. Akad. d. Wissensch. zu Berlin* 1869; transl. by B. V. Head, *Num. Chron.* 1870, 91 ff.

⁷ lvi.

⁸ As on 314.

⁹ 36.

¹⁰ 43.

¹¹ 47 f., 60 ff.

¹² id. 94 ff.

¹³ o.c. 169.

¹⁴ Hill, o.c. 180 ff.; G. Macdonald in *Proc-verb. et Mém. du Congr. Internat. de Num. . . . Bruxelles* 1910, 281 ff.

against the encroaching dangers of medieval kingship)¹⁵ is thus stated quite specifically and deliberately amplifies the significance of the city badge.

Since Macdonald's time the balanced principles which he defined have not been seriously questioned, and in the field of Greek coinage inquiry has shifted to other problems, neither of them unrelated to the significance of Greek coin types. In the first place, resolute and often successful efforts have been made to lower the opening dates for many important Greek coin-series, for example, the anonymous electrum of Ionia, the Aeginetan 'turtles', the Athenian 'owls', and the Corinthian 'colts':¹⁶ the effect of such chronological changes is of course to bring down the date at which the choice of a city-badge for international coinage came to be thought appropriate. Secondly, modern research has concentrated strongly on the movement—often world-wide—of Greek coinage in trade,¹⁷ the immense extent of which makes it obvious enough how important the choice of a clear and distinct city badge for coinage could be and indeed must have been.

The subtle relationship between the need to choose a distinguishing national or city badge and the usual desire, however unconsciously formed, to give some expression to generally pervasive religious feeling is to be seen in the first coinages of Rome. In the earliest ponderous bronze issues of Rome, cast on the standard of the libral As, there was no city badge of obviously recognizable form. The obverses were given up to a range of heads of deities, from Janus (the god of beginnings) downwards: the reverses showed a ship's prow (the significance of which, however clear originally, escaped later generations)¹⁸ together with a mark of value. There were no inscriptions. When Rome began, towards the middle of the third century B.C., to coin silver on Greek standards for circulation primarily in Greek cities in south Italy, the obverses again showed a variety of deities: the reverses, of differing types, were accompanied by the word ROMA or ROMANOM.¹⁹ Just over half a century later Rome began to coin denarii²⁰ which, while revaluing her own domestic bronze values in terms of silver, also spread throughout Italy and beyond. These showed an obverse with an invariable 'Roma' head, usually with a mark of value at first, while the reverses presented the Dioscuri with the word ROMA. In the early bronze—an essentially internal coinage—no state badge of full recognizability was required. In the silver intended for commerce with Greek Campania the word ROMA was essential in one or another form. In the final denarial coinage, destined for the widest internal and external use, the city badge is stable in the form of the Roma-head, supplemented by the word ROMA on the reverse. In all three groups, however, symbolism (whether for local or international purposes) is drawn quite naturally and without effort from religious sources.

It might be thought that Rome's denarial coinage, with initial types that were deeply rooted in state symbolism and untouched by any contemporary or day-to-day references, would have continued unchanged for a very long time. In fact, by the end of the second century B.C.—that is, less than a century after their institution—these types were already being substantially changed.²¹ As has been lately remarked, although day-to-day topicality was still a thing of the future, the firmly historical past was now being introduced on to Roman denarii by reference to great Romans of the past, with whom the annually changing mint-officers claimed family ties. The Rome of the present was, in other words, the creation of the Romans of the past. The final phase of change came in the first century B.C., when Republican coin types at last came to refer (however sparingly) to their living descendants. By now the 'Roma' head had long since disappeared from the coinage, and the name ROMA as well.²² Rome was to be seen and understood and admired in a swiftly changing series of coin types that were intensely personal to her leading generals and politicians and reflected the powerful political conflicts in which family competed with family and party

¹⁵ Oresme, *de Moneta*, ed. Johnson, ch. vi.

¹⁶ Cf. E. S. G. Robinson, *JHS* 1951, 156 ff.; W. L. Brown, *Num. Chron.* 1950, 177 ff.; C. M. Kraay, *Num. Chron.* 1956, 43 ff.

¹⁷ Cf. S. P. Noe, *Num. Notes and Mon.* 78, and in *Hesperia*, Suppl. viii; C. H. V. Sutherland, *AJP* 1943, 129 ff., *Num. Chron.* 1942, 1 ff., *Museum Notes* III, 15 ff.

¹⁸ T. O. Mabbott, *Num. Review* 1945, 5 ff.; Ovid, *Fasti* 1, 229 ff.

¹⁹ See H. Mattingly, *Journ. Warburg Inst.* 1937, 197 ff.

²⁰ H. Mattingly-E. S. G. Robinson, *Proc. Brit. Acad.* xviii, 1 ff.

²¹ A. Alföldi, *Essays in Rom. Coinage pres. to Harold Mattingly*, 63 ff.

²² Cf. Macdonald, *Coin Types* 185.

with party.²³ Such was the nature of Republican coinage when Julius Caesar seized it, and it is not at all surprising that he designed to place his own portrait on the denarial coinage—where, indeed, it appeared immediately before his death in 44.²⁴

It is necessary to emphasize these Republican developments if the significance of Roman imperial coin types, in their turn, is to be accurately understood. Indeed, if the purpose of imperial types has been from time to time incorrectly valued—as it undoubtedly has, one obvious reason for this lies in a too frequent willingness to attribute to imperial types, however rapidly changing, however explicit, something of the deliberate unexpressiveness of Greek types embodying a simple state symbol. Few of those who have sought to play down the significance of imperial types as a means of information have mentioned, or have appeared to study, the transformation of Republican types as a prelude to those of the Empire. And yet the Republican phase, as can scarcely be doubted, is in itself highly revealing.²⁵ It started with coin types that were utterly static national symbols, entirely in the Greek tradition. It ended with types in which various new elements of great importance were firmly established. There was, normally, an annual change of types—sometimes multiple. Contemporary portraiture became admissible for those great and powerful enough to equate the State with their own personal authority and power. A growing variety of semi-divine agencies had come to be represented, capable of being viewed—like Concordia, Pax, Pietas, Libertas, and Virtus—as the ethical yardsticks by which current political action must be measured.²⁶ Finally, and incontrovertibly, Republican coinage had developed not only the art of finite statement (e.g. in such striking forms as ‘Memmius aedilis Cerialia preimus fecit’ or ‘C. Ypsaeus cos. cepit Privernum’), but also the ability to give information, half pictorial and half verbal, in much shorter ways, as for example when a trophy of Gallic arms accompanied by seated captives tells, in combination with the single word CAESAR, all the essence of what could have been a much longer recital.²⁷ So great, indeed, was the revolution in Republican coin types that its significance can be overlooked only by the expedient of shutting one’s eyes to it. Viewed properly, however, as a monetary revolution it falls into its precise and proper place alongside the whole major course of political revolution under the Republic.

Numismatists of the twentieth century have had a clear understanding of the significance of these changes in Republican coin symbolism,²⁸ and they have used their knowledge of these changes in estimating the general intelligibility of subsequent imperial types.²⁹ Historians pure and simple, however, have not always been persuaded, still less convinced, by their conclusions and have tended to repudiate what is now the more or less standard view of numismatists, namely, that imperial types were deliberately intended to convey a message, however much or little was to be read into the message at the time of issue. Scepticism has most recently been voiced by Prof. A. H. M. Jones in the following comments on imperial types and legends: ‘Numismatists have studied these intensely and an historian may perhaps be permitted to say that in his opinion they have sometimes attached an exaggerated importance to them. This is a question on which there is no literary evidence: this very fact is of some significance, for, if coin legends and types had possessed the importance that some numismatists attach to them, it would seem likely that some ancient author would have commented on them. In the absence of any allusion to the matter in ancient literature, one can judge only on grounds of general probability.’³⁰

The essentials of this austere case against according any considerable degree of

²³ An unpublished study by Mr. Torrey James Luce, of Princeton, has shown, for example, how strikingly Apollo obverses reflect the dominance of Marians in politics from 93 to 82 B.C. and, by their temporary absences, reflect also the interruptions, mainly Sullan, to which the Marians were subjected. I am grateful to Mr. Luce for the opportunity of seeing his paper.

²⁴ C. M. Kraay, *Num. Chron.* 1954, 18 ff.

²⁵ C. H. V. Sutherland, *Coinage in Rom. Imp. Policy* ch. I.

²⁶ Cf. H. Mattingly, *Harvard Theol. Rev.* 1937, 103 ff.

²⁷ E. A. Sydenham, *Rom. Republ. Coinage*, nos. 912 ff., 921, 1008 ff.

²⁸ See E. Babelon, *Descr. hist. et. chron. des monn. de la Républ. rom.*; H. A. Grueber, *Coins of the Rom. Republ. in the Brit. Mus.*; and E. A. Sydenham, o.c.

²⁹ See H. Mattingly, *Coins of the Rom. Emp. in the Brit. Mus.*; M. Grant, *From Imperium to Auctoritas and Roman Imperial Money*; C. H. V. Sutherland, *Coinage in Rom. Imp. Policy* and in *Num. Review* 1944, 5 ff., and *AJP* 1947, 47 ff.

³⁰ ‘Numismatics and History,’ in *Essays in Rom. Coinage pres. to Harold Mattingly* 13 ff., esp. 14–6.

significance to imperial types are based on grounds which I have already criticized before,³¹ namely, a reluctance to allow a numismatic X to state Y unless there is confirmation or support from Z. For it is clear that, if one or two ancient authors had mentioned coin types in a clear or appreciative manner, as a 'going concern', so to speak, the doubts might have been qualified. To the numismatist who knows his material, however, it must appear strange, to say the least, that while ancient historians omit to mention any theory either of imperial coin types on the one hand or of imperial inscriptions, reliefs, and public monuments on the other hand, the evidence of the latter can be conceded a wide and independent validity, but not that of the former. The question of what an ancient author thought worthy of comment or silence is obviously interesting in itself, but it is hardly valid to argue that, at this remove of time, we should necessarily agree with him in his choice of what to pass over and what to mention—even if he could guarantee the safe transmission of his text.

But Jones continues as follows: 'The legends and types were frequently varied. Some have obviously topical significance, and some, as Professor Grant has recently argued, were issued to commemorate the jubilee, centenary or bicentenary of some famous event. This would suggest that the authorities who chose the legends and types—and we do not know who they were—took an interest in the coins they produced. Some of the legends and types have a fairly obvious propaganda-value, celebrating imperial victories or benefactions. No doubt they were intended to be vehicles of propaganda, though their importance can be exaggerated. Latin legends meant nothing to the eastern half of the empire, where anyone who was literate could read Greek only. In the western provinces the great bulk of the population, who spoke Celtic, Iberian, Punic, or various Illyrian tongues, would be unaffected. The educated classes had something better to read than two or three words on a denarius.'

This remarkable passage merits a short analytical summary:—(1) Legends and types were frequently varied. (2) Some are topical. (3) Some are commemorative. (4) Their choice presumably reflects official interest. (5) They possessed a propaganda value. (6) This was intentional. (7) But Latin legends were meaningless at large in east and west alike, and (8) would command no attention from the educated in any case.

To the numismatist who is familiar with imperial coinage Jones's comments, for all their irreducible minimum level of accuracy, will appear to invite the charge of serious and misleading understatement. This charge might be brought home in various ways and at considerable length. Here it must suffice to point out the inaccuracy of such oversimplification by shorter and more selective means, the cumulative effect of which will suggest that any attempt to estimate the purpose and effect of imperial types (by which I shall subsequently imply types *and* legends) is probably worth very little unless it is backed by a much fuller comparative knowledge of the material than his comments either suggest or encourage.

First, then, the frequent variation of types. The truth is both more and less than Jones appears to think, for he gives no hint either of the immense degree of type-variation which characterizes some reigns, or of the fluctuating range in variation as between one reign and another.³² It is always technically easier for any administration, and presumably more economical, to leave types absolutely unchanged over a long period: that is the practice to-day (save for changes of date) and it was not unknown to the Roman Empire, as witness the coinages, say, of Tiberius and (with changes of series mark) the first Tetrarchy. Accordingly, in reckoning variation we must necessarily include as major variants all issues in which the essentials of former types have been changed, as when a former type is associated with a new legend, or a former legend is retained combined with a new type, quite apart from the production of coins bearing both new types and new legends. The analysis on these lines of the type-variation of imperial issues down (for the sake of argument) to the end of Hadrian's reign, gives a curious and arresting picture.

The coinage of Augustus—however varied it may now seem to those who know it—stands at what is, by comparison with later reigns, a very modest level indeed. Tiberius

³¹ *Num. Chron.* 1951, Proceedings 13 ff.

³² Such fluctuation in the range of types is not, of course, to be confused (as it was confused by

Tenney Frank, *Econ. Survey of Anc. Rome* v, 32) with fluctuation in the volume of coinage.

drops thereafter to an even lower figure, not afterwards paralleled in the period under review. With Gaius there is a sharp rise; with Claudius a fall nearly to the Augustan level; Nero's list of types thrusts upwards to a point much higher than any of his predecessors. Then comes Galba, with a variation-frequency which is without parallel and will probably surprise those who do not know just how elaborate his coinage was. Otho sinks low; Vitellius soars—to a point, indeed, above Vespasian; Titus is extremely high, but Domitian drops to the old Julio-Claudian level. Nerva rises sharply; Trajan sinks again; and Hadrian lifts a little.

The statistician will of course point out that, once the habit is formed (especially from 69 onwards) whereby a newly established emperor issued numerous accession coins of a programme character in his first year, it will tend to over-emphasize the type-variation of emperors who reigned for a short period, like Titus and Nerva and (even more) Galba, Otho, and Vitellius. That, indeed, is so; and these sharp peaks would undoubtedly have been flattened if these emperors had lasted longer. Nevertheless, as between one ephemeral and another, comparison is still profitable; and in any case it remains true that, e.g. Galba, used far more variants than Claudius and infinitely more than Tiberius. Regarded on the basis of averages in long reigns, it also remains true that Domitian's average over a fifteen-year reign, though higher than that of Augustus over forty-five years, is much lower than Vespasian's over ten years. This is not the place to draw political conclusions. It is enough if the statement that 'the legends and types were frequently varied' is shown to understate the facts to a dangerous degree, since the sharply fluctuating rate of variation is entirely obscured.

If we now take the second comment, that some types are topical, we shall find similar results. But here we cannot use statistics to help us, for at the very outset there is the difficulty—not specified by Jones—of what constitutes true topicality. Is a topical coin type an automatic or a deliberately designed reflection of events? The distinction is easily seen by consideration of a few types. 'Aegypto (or Iudaea) Capta,' 'Civitibus Asiae Restitutis,' 'Vehiculatione Italiae Remissa,' 'Rex Parthis Datus' and other such types tell a factual story which is generally clear not only in the pictorial symbolism but also in the often finite detail of the wording: these types are for us loudly ringing echoes of historical facts, and presumably played the same part in antiquity. We know equally well the point of the Augustan types celebrating the Parthian *démarche* of 19 B.C.³³ But these are types that continued a particular declaration for some while after the primary moment of topicality had passed, sometimes in increasingly symbolized form. Were these, then, not topical? Was the reminder of diplomatic success against Parthia no more than dull and aimless repetition? Or, since that success was undoubtedly great and news spread out slowly from the centre, was not that repetition deliberate, and was not its impact, therefore, in a new sense topical? To take another example: the types of Vindex included some which quite obviously echoed those of Nero and his predecessors.³⁴ These were in themselves unusual types: their continuation cannot easily be put down to unimaginative or lazy repetition, since the very circumstances of Vindex's revolt gave them a manifestly new twist. If so, can topicality be refused to what was, in essence, an old type if it was used in a new and surprising context?

At this point attention passes to the third main comment, that some types are commemorative. That of course is perfectly true, as Grant has established in great detail.³⁵ And even if he has at times overstrained his case, we can now understand and relish the deliberation with which an antiquarian taste, rooted in tradition,³⁶ selected types recalling past events, either in a simple form, like Claudius' joint commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of his birth at Lyons in the year when the Altar of Lyons was instituted, or more complex, as when his Pax type coincided with the 300th anniversary of the temple of Janus, the 200th of the ceremonial *augurium Salutis*, and the fiftieth of Augustus' cult-association of Pax, Salus, and Janus.³⁷ There were commemorative types of other

³³ C. H. V. Sutherland, *Num. Chron.* 1945, 58 ff.

³⁴ C. M. Kraay, *Num. Chron.* 1952, 78 ff.

³⁵ M. Grant, *Roman Anniversary Issues*, passim.

³⁶ A. Momigliano, *Claudius: the Emperor and his Achievement* 1–19.

³⁷ C. H. V. Sutherland, *Coinage in Rom. Imperial Policy* 127, 135.

kinds as well, such as the 'restored' coins issued so notably (for instance) by the Flavian emperors, who, as Mattingly long since pointed out,³⁸ reissued the types of some predecessors and omitted all reference to others (e.g. Gaius, Nero, Otho, and Vitellius) and so set the seal of historical approval on some whose memory they kept green and withheld it from others. As a further example, one might point to the many types of Vespasian which, independent of strictly numerical anniversary reckoning, were quite obviously borrowed from Augustus' coinage.³⁹

Can we say, with Jones, that such types are quite simply commemorative and nothing more? For surely it is a question of what is commemorated, and by whom, and when and why. And this is the question of topicality again, in a different form. Vindex used Nero's types with a deliberately new application of which the relevance and strength is beyond question: the Flavians, a new dynasty, classified their predecessors not as Julio-Claudians one and all, but as good or bad emperors. Vespasian in particular, as founder of the new dynasty, recalled the blessed founder of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. In such instances as this, it would appear that commemoration, far from being the automatic result of uninspired calendar-scrutiny in a government office, is quite deliberate. You commemorate what you wish to commemorate, and in politics what you wish to do is usually what favours you. Choice of such types, therefore, must reflect (as Jones' fourth comment would concede) the operation of official interest. The full depth of this interest cannot of course be estimated from the few and select examples here given. It can be seen only from the immense type variation recorded above, and from the intrinsic difference of feeling between the types of one reign and those of another (e.g. Tiberius and Gaius). The fact that, though we know a good deal about the mint-workmen,⁴⁰ we do not know what official chose imperial types,⁴¹ is regrettable, but not in itself any more serious than our ignorance of virtually all the Civil Service personalities at Rome at the time. Choice of types may have been the responsibility of the imperial *procurator a studiis*, just as mint-organization proper was, under the Flavians at least, the task of the *procurator a rationibus*.⁴² What is beyond doubt is that choice was deliberate⁴³ and that it was long to remain so, as a single glance at the vast change in type-content in, for example, Diocletian's reform will quickly and soberly remind us.⁴⁴

Imperial coin types were, then, beyond doubt the result of official interest, by whomsoever exerted; and this in turn suggests, what Jones has conceded, that they possessed an intentional propaganda-value. But it is the degree of this value that is questioned, and mainly on linguistic grounds: it is objected that Latin would not be generally understood in the Greek-speaking East, nor among the different tongues of the Roman West, while 'the educated classes had something better to read than two or three words on a denarius'. To some extent the application of these statements must be admitted to be conjectural. For, although there can be no doubt that the East as a whole was a Greek-speaking area, there is equally no doubt that Latin was much seen, if only from the coinage, and that though few might know the tongue in detail it was as easy to pick up the essential Latin on a coin then as it is to do so now with the coinage of England. The coinage current in Athens from the first century onwards consisted increasingly of imperial silver and bronze, with Latin legends and a symbolism involving no greater difficulty than the recognition, under Hadrian, for example, of such figures as Genius, Providentia, Roma, Moneta, Salus, Pietas, Ceres, Virtus (nearly all interchangeable with Greek equivalents), or the understanding under Constantine of types of military standards, Sol, a Vota wreath, Victories, Jupiter, or a Camp-gate.⁴⁵ At the Roman colony of Corinth Latin was of course the normal language of coins of the original local mint, though these were afterwards supplemented by Greek issues from elsewhere.⁴⁶ At Sardis the currency of the imperial age was at first

³⁸ *Num. Chron.* 1920, 177 ff. and esp. 183.

³⁹ H. Mattingly-E. A. Sydenham, *Rom. Imp. Coinage* II, 6 f.

⁴⁰ See most recently R. A. G. Carson in *Essays in Rom. Coinage* pres. to Harold Mattingly 226 ff.

⁴¹ Cf. C. H. V. Sutherland, *AJP* 1947, 60.

⁴² Statius, *Silvae* III, 3, 103-5.

⁴³ Cf. J. M. C. Toynbee, *Arch. Journ.* 1942, 33 ff.

⁴⁴ C. H. V. Sutherland, *Essays in Rom. Coinage* pres. to Harold Mattingly 174 ff.

⁴⁵ *The Athenian Agora* II, *Coins* (by Margaret Thompson).

⁴⁶ *Corinth* VI, *Coins* (by K. M. Edwards), and A. R. Bellinger, *Catalogue of the Coins found at Corinth* 1925.

Greek bronze and imperial 'Latin' silver: later, 'Latin' bronze was added.⁴⁷ At Syrian Antioch, similarly, Greek and Latin legends circulated side by side in the first and second centuries, many of the Latin-inscribed coins coming from mints in the Greek East.⁴⁸ At Dura a mass of Greek-inscribed silver tetradrachms with simple symbolism (head/eagle) was supplemented by much imperial 'Latin' silver, of eastern and western mints, and predominantly Greek bronze, mainly from Antioch.⁴⁹

The day-to-day currency of the Greek East was, therefore, strongly mingled. No doubt the Latin tongue was not always understood, but Roman symbolism could not so easily be misinterpreted: Pax and Eirene, Salus and Hygieia, Victoria and Nike, and many other personifications were alike in East and West, while it took no great effort to grasp the significance, let us say, of the association of the emperor's head with a *corona civica*, or of the associated heads of Nero and Agrippina, or of the representation of Vespasian's sons, or of Vespasian in triumph, or of Judaea mourning.⁵⁰ The ancient capacity to interpret symbolism must not be underrated.⁵¹ Moreover, the imperial portrait was scarcely ever lacking, and it is remarkably unwise for any modern historian to overlook the importance of an element which in ancient times was of absolutely primary value.⁵²

The intelligibility of imperial types in the West, too, must be considered much more carefully. Jones has urged that greater effort should be made to determine the different population-groups served by the various main sections of coinage and also to distinguish between the relative frequency of the various types themselves. To some extent, of course, these inquiries have been proceeding for a long time.⁵³ Degrees of rarity or commonness were indicated fairly clearly as long ago as Cohen, and have been standard in *Roman Imperial Coinage* since 1926 (vol. ii). The different social absorption-levels of imperial coinage have similarly been studied, especially in the form of the major excavation-reports of the last few decades. It is now clear, for example, that the coinage mainly absorbed by the common soldiery in the average permanent camp consisted of *asses* and *dupondii*, with very few *sestertii* and virtually no gold and silver. The common soldier in early frontier camps like Vindonissa saw little but the 'middle-brass' pronouncements of Augustus (with their emphasis on his portrait, his *corona civica*, his *tribunicia potestas*) together with coins showing the Lyons altar.⁵⁴ Later sites like Hofheim and Colchester were full of Claudian money showing Antonia, Ceres (viewed probably as Annona), Libertas, Constantia, and the fighting Minerva. *Sestertii* by contrast enjoyed a much more closely metropolitan life (e.g. at Colchester 10 per cent to 85 per cent Æ_2),⁵⁵ and it was, it seems, precisely for those who had more to do than read two or three words on a coin that their immense variety was, curiously enough, designed—and probably their aesthetic beauty too.⁵⁶ Gold and silver, of course, were empire-wide in the possession of higher-income persons like army officers and civilian administrators.

It would be fruitless to ask precisely what the average imperial subject did in fact read, or even how often he could read, for the simple reason that no adequate answer can possibly be given. The picture of the inhabitants of a small Italian or provincial town immersed in political or historical manuscripts, or engaged in lively disputation about the contents of the available public or private inscriptions, is not one which will invite universal belief, whatever Augustus hoped from the circulation of his *Res Gestae*. We do not even know what was the average degree of literacy in any given area. It may, however, safely be presumed to have been low: not so low, obviously, that no one could appreciate public documents like the *Res Gestae* or Latin inscriptions from Cyrene on the one hand to Wroxeter on the other, but low enough to exclude large numbers from understanding

⁴⁷ *Sardis* xi, *Coins* (by H. W. Bell).

⁴⁸ *Antioch-on-the-Orontes* iv, *Coins* (by D. B. Waage).

⁴⁹ *Dura-Europos* vi, *Coins* (by A. R. Bellinger).

⁵⁰ H. Mattingly-E. A. Sydenham, *Rom. Imp. Coinage* i, 145; ii, 52 f., 58.

⁵¹ See J. M. C. Toynbee in *Essays in Rom. Coinage* pres. to Harold Mattingly 205 ff.

⁵² Cf. F. Lenormant, o.c. iii, 211 f., for collected references.

⁵³ See most recently M. Grant in *Essays in Rom. Coinage* pres. to Harold Mattingly 96 ff.

⁵⁴ Cf. C. M. Kraay, *Schweiz. Münzblätter* 1952, 49 ff.

⁵⁵ E. Ritterling, *Annalen des Vereins für Nassauische Altertumskunde und Geschichtsforschung* 1904 and 1912; C. F. C. Hawkes and M. R. Hull, *Camulodunum* (Soc. Ant. Res. Rep. 19) i, 142 ff.

⁵⁶ Further light on this matter should come from the forthcoming studies of Mr. D. W. MacDowall on the coinage of Nero.

them. And for a population generally such as this a picture on a coin, with two or three words, was conceivably just the quota of current information most admirably adapted to the standard of capabilities ; and where both pictures and words were constantly changing, the interest in new issues would have been no less—and perhaps much more—than is the case to-day with our own new coin issues. Analogy is of course always tempting, but very often dangerous, especially when the precise degree of parallelism—upon which the efficacy of analogy depends most powerfully—is open to serious question. At best it can serve as a stimulating suggestion—that is, where no direct causal connection exists : at worst it may be fallacious. Thus when the function and behaviour of Roman imperial coin types is likened to that of modern postage-stamps⁵⁷ the analogy is to be regarded with the utmost scepticism. It is true that both authenticate a government product, and that both, without question, reflect the activity of government officials, and that both, again, incorporate the principle of variety. But there the likeness ends. The modern postage stamp has always existed in an age when official propaganda of news has depended on organs of information far more ample than mere stamp-design, which is therefore devoted, apart from its essential symbolism of authority, to often quite formal aspects of general national interest. In the imperial coinage, however, not only is there seen to be an overwhelming desire to vary types, but those types play so constantly and (even to modern eyes) so skilfully with different concepts of imperial government that, in an age when news could not be propagated by newspapers and radio, their intention cannot be doubted. They were, in essence, organs of information.

How far they succeeded is another matter. Their impact, as we have seen, varied from one part of the empire and from one social class to another. Even if they were understood they may not have been trusted. This, however, is immaterial to the discussion of coin types originated by imperial government. Modern reluctance to allow a proper weight to the eloquence of imperial types arises from a particular defect of approach. These types represent, *ex hypothesi*, the imperial and governmental attitude. They appear to conflict at many points with the attitude of non-imperial sources of evidence, as is clearly evident, for example, in the tenor of Claudius' types. They must do so inevitably ; for the history of the empire is in one sense the history of a long continuing effort by imperial government to conciliate the opinion of the governed. Unless they are regarded, therefore, from the imperial standpoint their whole *raison d'être* is obscured and confused. They were not a simple non-political commentary, like the modern postage stamp, but an informed and often subtly suggestive plea by the man who, granted favourable public opinion, held all the cards. They were, in short, a part of the imperial mentality—an aspect of Roman history which, owing to the abundance of comment by ancient historians who were anti-imperial when they were not sycophantic, has received scant attention. Only perhaps for Augustus has any true effort been made to understand personal and private mentality, and this is due to a considerable extent to the survival of his own *Res Gestae*. We willingly adduce the ideas expressed in this elaborate pro-imperial statement when we are estimating the imperial policy of Augustus, but should we or could we have done so without the *Res Gestae* itself ?

In the last resort the test of imperial coin types is very simple and very effective. We know their immense range and their constant change. Do any of them—to refer back to what was said earlier—specifically and accurately record events independently recorded ? The answer, of course, is that they do, and in very many instances throughout the imperial epoch. If, then, many independently recorded events are already mirrored recognizably in the coinage, logic might suggest the operation of apt and deliberate choice in those which are not independently confirmed in the same way, or of which we have not yet grasped the full idiom and significance. Indeed, the numismatist is bound to be alert to such meaning. He acquires a peculiar awareness of type-significance, of a kind which the epigraphist also acquires in his own field and is expected to acquire ; and the fact that the regular historian may not be thus trained cannot be allowed to penalize a numismatic process—unless, that is to say, he can adequately explain why the appeal of imperial types was sometimes provincial and sometimes metropolitan, why some types were common and some rare,

⁵⁷ As by Jones, o.c., 15.

why type variation lasted for generation after generation and why the types of one reign can differ so radically in spirit from those of another. The historian has not in fact done so yet. And these phenomena cannot in any case be understood unless a deep familiarity with them is gained by systematic inquiry of a kind which very few historians since Mommsen have attempted or even contemplated.

We return, in the end, to that one of Macdonald's axioms which alone is applicable to Roman imperial types: 'no explanation of the origin and nature of coin types can be regarded as satisfactory which is not applicable to all coins of a homogeneous group.' Logic does not permit us to say of imperial coin types of the formative period that some were intended to reflect official policy and others were not, that some suggest deliberate choice and others do not, that some are intentionally full of meaning and others intentionally meaningless. It is true that the application of some types is to modern eyes much more obvious and direct than that of others, and that others, again, do little more than provide the common background against which the bigger statements are more luminously displayed. Their intelligibility, in all cases, would have varied province by province, and region by region. But since, as I have argued elsewhere,⁵⁸ the interpretation of types must always be made on a major and not a minor basis, there is no reason to doubt either that the ceaseless propagation of those types was intended to conciliate opinion or that their choice directly reflects official mentality. I see no reason to alter the view which I expressed when I wrote: ⁵⁹ 'The imperial coinage furnishes what is at once the most voluminous, the most constant, the most official, and the most accurate series of [Roman] documents that has come down to us. Though its multiple voice spoke softly of some things and declined altogether to mention others, it was comprehensive, authentic and personal. It was planned for an audience of countless thousands, all of whom, in greater or less degree, looked to the *princeps* as the apex of a political system on which depended the peace and stability of the civilized world; and it furnished world opinion with a miniature but strictly official commentary upon the man and his administration.'

⁵⁸ *Nun. Chron.* 1951, Proceedings 18.

⁵⁹ *Coinage in Rom. Imp. Policy* 184.